

XX March 2012

Rt Hon Chris Grayling MP  
Minister for Employment  
Department for Work and Pensions  
Caxton House  
Tothill Street  
London  
SW1H 9DA

Dear Chris

We are writing to you in relation to the Government's consultation '*Accounting for the effects of cancer treatment*', which will come to a close shortly.

We would like to take this opportunity to outline our priorities for improving the Work Capability Assessment (WCA) for cancer patients.

### **Ensuring that more cancer patients are able to access the Support Group**

We welcome the Government's commitments to ensuring that more cancer patients awaiting or receiving treatment will have access to the Employment and Support Allowance (ESA) Support Group. Your recognition that a greater range of cancer treatments have highly debilitating effects is a critical step forward in improving the WCA. It will mean that more cancer patients will be placed into the Support Group.

We believe that the guiding principle of reform should be to ensure that cancer patients get the support they need in the least stressful manner possible. We also believe that the decision to provide this support should be based on a factual assessment of medical evidence. These principles are in line with commitments made by the Government and we look forward to the new system being in place as soon as possible.

### **Ensuring recovering cancer patients remain in the Support Group for longer**

As you know, the cancer community opposed the Government's proposal to introduce a time-limit for contributory ESA of 12 months. This is because the ongoing effects of cancer treatment mean that many people require support for far more than 12 months before they are able to return to work.

Therefore, we welcome the Government's commitment to look again at how the benefits system deals with patients who have finished their cancer treatment but remain highly debilitated by its effects. In our opinion these patients should be dealt with in a similar fashion to the approach already outlined for those awaiting or receiving treatment. This would mean a presumption that cancer patients recovering from treatment would remain in the Support Group subject to the opinion of a patient's healthcare professional. This presumption would be reviewed after a fixed period (e.g. six months). We believe that this approach is in line with the comments you made in a debate on the Welfare Reform Bill on 1 February.

## **Protecting those currently at risk of losing ESA**

We are anxious to protect those patients currently in the Work Related Activity Group who are due to lose their benefit when the ESA reforms come into force in April. Many in this group will be in very poor health. Given the Government's desire for more cancer patients to be placed in the Support Group, we believe that those at risk of losing their ESA should not do so until they have been reassessed under the new system.

## **Next Steps**

We believe it is essential that representatives from the cancer community play a full and meaningful role in the design of a new ESA assessment process for cancer patients. In our view they should also be closely involved in the formulation of guidance for healthcare professionals and decision-makers. We are encouraged by your commitment to ensure this happens. We look forward to receiving more information shortly about a timetable for implementation and further engagement following the consultation.

Yours sincerely

Chief Executives of CCG members